

# Explore the Bible: Promise Kept

December 13, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Dec. 23 focuses on Luke 1:26-38.*

Children in Christmas pageants love to tell the story of the birth of Jesus. The story is told of a tiny baby born in a manger, wrapped in a blanket, and sleeping without a care in the world. Usually, a doll is used to represent the baby Jesus, but sometimes a brave little baby boy or girl is placed in the manger, which makes the story become a real-life illustration. Mary and Joseph, dressed in Galilean peasant clothes, are surrounded by children dressed as stable animals, angels and shepherds, all are intensely peering in the manger at the special center of attention, baby Jesus. What better occasion to sing “Joy to the World” than at this time? However, was it “Joy to the World” at the initial announcement of the birth?

## The Greeting (Luke 1:26-29)

Luke is careful to remind readers of the miraculous birth of John the Baptist, preparing us for the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus (1:5-25). Zechariah and Elizabeth longed to have a child. Announced by the angel Gabriel, God would grant them a son, a forerunner of the Messiah.

Out of all the women in the world to give birth to God’s son, a young Jewish girl was chosen. Luke is careful to emphasize that Mary was a virgin, engaged to Joseph, but not married yet. No doubt, she was startled by the visit and the announcement by the angel Gabriel.

“Joy to the World” is easy for us to understand because we know the beginning and the ending of the miraculous story. God’s plan was perfect. Unless he allowed his Son to come down as a man wrapped in flesh to pay for our sins, mankind could not be redeemed.

## **The Promise (Luke 1:30-33)**

On one occasion, Gabriel appeared to Daniel to explain a vision. The angel's appearance terrified Daniel and caused him to fall on his face (Daniel 8:17). Gabriel told Daniel not to be afraid. On another occasion, Zechariah was "startled and gripped with fear" when Gabriel appeared before him (Luke 1:12). Gabriel told Zechariah not to be afraid. When Gabriel appeared to young Mary, she was "greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be" (1:29). The angel responded, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God" (1:30). Although Mary was troubled, the angel proceeded to tell her God's son would be born through her womb, be given the throne of David, and would reign over the house of Jacob forever.

The Old Testament prophecy records the blessing of Isaac to Jacob, "May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you" (Genesis 27:29). Another prophecy spoken to Jacob by the Lord was that his descendants would be numerous and blessed throughout the whole world (Genesis 28:14). Still another prophecy recorded is the blessing of Jacob to his son Judah, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his" (Genesis 49:10). Another prophecy is spoken, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Joy is exemplified in God's people as they experienced the everlasting promise that God provides a way to salvation through the redemptive power of his Son, Jesus.

*Share some promises of God which may have taken years to be fulfilled.*

## **The Explanation (Luke 1:34-37)**

Mary understood the 'why' of the promise. However, the 'how' of the promise troubled her because she was a virgin. This kind of birth defies nature. God created mankind in his image and commanded them to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28).

How, then, will this happen? "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (1:35). Gabriel explained to Mary that the birth would be supernatural, and the Child would be Deity.

Indeed, the supernatural birth of Jesus is recorded in the Bible for generations to read. God promised a Savior would come. Believers can have the confidence that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world by believing his word.

## **The Commitment (Luke 1:38)**

In humble submission, Mary made a commitment to serve God. "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled" (1:38). Mary's faith in God allowed her to submit to his will.

It is not always easy to have faith, remain humble, and submit to the will of God. In order to please God, these are at least three disciplines a believer should practice daily. Indeed, let us rejoice in knowing the Lord has come, and let us share this same joy with others.

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